

THE DARK FANTASTIC: LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY, AND DIGITAL ARTS

“I CAN GIVE YOU MY LONELINESS, MY DARKNESS, THE HUNGER OF MY HEART, I AM TRYING TO BRIBE YOU WITH UNCERTAINTY, WITH DANGER, WITH DEFEAT.” — JORGE LUIS BORGES

NICK LAND: PHILO-FICTION, CHASM, AND THE ABSTRACT MANIFESTO

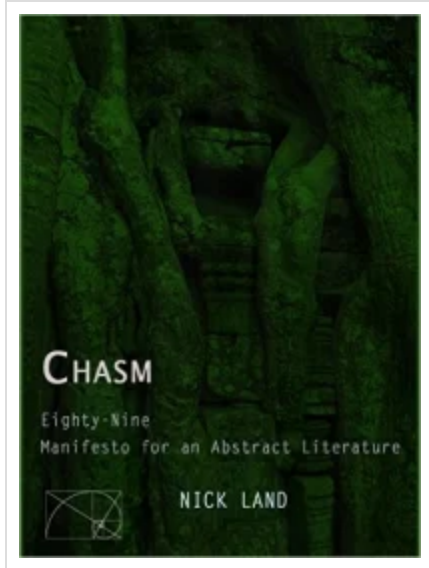
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Abstract literature writes in clues, with clue words, but without hope.

– Nick Land, Abstract Manifesto

“Nothing was to have taken place. Less, even, than usual, or than standard procedure recommended. That was clear.”¹ So begins Nick Land’s new philo-fiction, **Chasm**. True to this statement this strange amalgam of – can we call it philosophy, hyperstition, abstraction to the nth degree, an non-movement around absolute Zero; or, like those fabulations of Borges, Calvino, Ballard, Lem, or any number of anti-metaphysical metaphysicians of recent repute call this a dip in the labyrinth of a-literature?



Reading *Chasm* is like entering a fog, a realm where the known and unknown cross each other in the night, their knives honed sharp and clean readied for the event that will never happen. Nothing can happen in this world. Yet, this is not some static world of timeless instants, but rather a world whose clarity and resilience shift among the paranoid dreams of a crew of misfits all heading toward their own private dooms. Before the tale is over everyone, but Zoth – the Caliban of this tale, and the protagonist of this death-march, Tom Symns, will succumb to their own merciless minds. Zoth and Symns will each in his own way benefit from a form of absolute impersonalism and indifference that will keep them above the melee of horror.

Symns, an agent of Chasm, a secret military contractor, with an almost *mission impossible* appeal, is the operative *par excellence* – a dead man walking, an emotionally cool psychopathic and affectless creature whose traumas in previous missions has left him in a cold and lonely place of pure terror – not his, but toward those who get in his way. He's sent on a mission to discard a product of this secret corporation. He asks no questions, and gets no answers about his assignment. In fact after reading through his control data he enters it into a carry-on autodestruct compartment that shreds it like a Tom Cruise sequencer. The only thing he's curious about is the amalgam of warped and paranoid creatures he will have to share this voyage over the sea with.

A motley crew of religious and irreligious fear mongers and low-life scum will, along with the captain – a hyper-active, endless idiot questioner, Captain James Frazer, become a part of the crew of the *Pythoness*, and due to its own automatic and AI controlled systems leave the crew with nothing, absolutely nothing on the voyage to do but get into trouble through a long and convoluted series of paranoid adventures. The ship, *The Pythoness*, they will sail on has only recently been designed to specification by the Chasm Corporation to carry the artifact they seek to dispose. We are never sure of just what it is they are transporting, and it is just this vagueness of the missions actual mission that will haunt us throughout the tale. Along the way we begin discovering that maybe just maybe this strange object whose origin and work are as obscure and mysterious as everything else might be the cause of certain effects that happen to the crew: sleeplessness, insomnia, hallucinations, lucid dreams, and ultimately singular manifestations of voices, whispers, and madness for each of the crew.

Even before they set out on their long voyage Symns will feel a “subtle tremor of resignation passed through him. Loss of control was something he already knew about, but that didn't mean he had to like it.” (C: KL 129) He'll visit a local pub which was nestled “into the cliff, close to the dock, was a small, atmospheric bar, called *The Crab Pot*. The name made it sound like a restaurant, but the little food that was served there looked inedible. It had settled itself confidently upon the sharp cusp between authenticity and simulation.” (C: KL 131)

Symns boarding the ship for the first time will be confronted by the captain. Suspicious and almost unsure if he will accept or reject this rep from Chasm, Frazer who has already researched the web and discovered that Chasm seems to be a front for some nefarious organization or governmental agency, but tells Symns: “I’ve no idea what ‘QASM’ stands for, what it is, or what it does. It’s strangely difficult to find out. I’m assuming it’s a business, with customers, but if so, it’s not exactly broadcasting the fact. Say I wanted to buy something from them ...” “You don’t.” “On the web, the company says it’s selling ‘deep technology solutions’,” he persisted. “Okay, that sounds like a business – like marketing spin – but it isn’t really telling me anything at all.” “This is coming up now?” It wasn’t at all where I wanted our conversation to be. I’d somehow imagined he would know that. (C: KL 143)

Things will go back and forth like that across the months and weeks of the voyage. Without giving away the storyline I’ll only mention the artifact itself, the “thing” that is to be lowered into the deep abyss of the trench, the Mariana:

The cargo had been pre-installed within a technologically-sophisticated closed unit, whose design had followed a smooth, asymptotic curve to the edge of the absolute. It was like the Pythoness herself, but to a higher power. Upon arrival at the destination – as confirmed by the inbuilt satellite navigation system – my responsibility was to enter the activation code and initiate the release sequence. Three weeks on a boat, for nine key-strokes. After a ninety-second delay, the thing we were transporting would then be dropped into the earth’s deepest submarine abyss. Execution of this simple task would be the culmination of the mission, completely exhausting whatever meaning it might have. In any case, by the end, we’d probably still have learnt next to nothing about it. (C: 168-173)

What the crew enacts and suffers has more to do with the unknown both inside and outside themselves... a seeping of darkness from elsewhere that shapes their thoughts even as it delivers them one by one to the corrosion and corruption of mutual degradation. Madness for each teeters on the borderlands wavering between the known and unknown, and Death like a lost lover follows us and haunts us even as we seek to remedy our own fates within the Human Security Regime. Only those who have pushed through the mask of madness and into the impersonal inhumanism at the core of their being come through if not unscathed at least immortal in the knowledge that death is all, and eternal; even for the living dead.

I admit the execution was not perfect for Land, yet the story compared to his previous dream-quest or virtual excursion was tighter and more concrete in setting and dialogue, while allowing the abstract philosophical underpinnings to unload their clues slowly and assuredly. It enacted the principles set forth in his Abstract Manifesto with an interesting twist, revealing the experimental nature of the work as a philo-fiction. This notion of an almost atheistic allogoreises or typology of the constitution of horror that leads the mind to thought, a horror thought somewhat in the tradition of Eugene Thacker’s trilogy on horror philosophy, yet with the Landian touch – quirky, skeptical, lucid, eloquent and refined to the point of an almost mundane consistency. The clues are there not in some hidden place, but in the very immediate grasp of the truth: that nothing happens, and nothing can happen. The story recites its own repetitions not in difference or sameness, but under the sign of a Bataillean heterogeneity that leads into inner-experience that only the solitary reader can appreciate.

ABSTRACT MANIFESTO

In his notes at the end of his short disquieting philo-horror we discover Land’s Manifesto for an Abstract Literature.

§ 101 – Disintegration inspires a thousand manifestoes, as our age confirms. Here is another. It would be a manifesto in defense of nothing, if nothing needed – or even tolerated – defending. With its solicitude mocked by alien voids, it can only attack something – anything (everything).

Reading a recent essay by my friend Cengiz Erdem *Postnihilistic Speculations on That Which Is Not: A Thought-World According to an Ontology of Non-Being* we come across this:

A thought thinking itself is thinking nothing other than nothing. It thinks itself as its own object, which means that it thinks nothing as something. This circular thought we designate as the thought of nihilism. It is this thought thinking itself as the thought of nihilism which we name post-nihilism. Primarily driven by the thoughts of Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze, François Laruelle and Michel Henry respectively, the post-nihilistic thought attempts to theorize the unilateral duality of the dialectical conceptions of immanence/transcendence and affirmation/negation.

Shall we always be caught in the circle of this dialectical flux, shifting back and forth between extreme limits, unable to find a stable place to of foundation, ground, place, situation, act upon which to rest our weary thoughts? No. We who are most restless are condemned to the dispersal of repetition and difference, wanderers of the Abyss.

A few years back I began reading once again several of those children of Kant who in one form or another develop a view onto our sensual dispersal. Such men whose flirtations with Idealism, Objects, Being, Phenomenon etc. would lead them to waver among the appearances lost amid the battles between Humean skepticism and empiricism, and the pre-critical reflections of the Rationalists seeking a way out of the traps and errors of the German Idealist traditions. Of recent vintage is the work of Graham Harman whose strange and weird realism beckons us into a vacuous actuality, a world of events in which everything that exists in as inscrutable substances that lie in some sort of still-undetermined vacuum or void. Yet, in their weirdness these singular things, entities, objects that exist in vacuity manage to communicate with one another.

But if things exist in non-relation, how do they ever breach the gap between voids to communicate or interact with anything else? What is the causal mechanism that allows such vacuous objects to awaken out of their dormancy and enter into relation with other things? Land for his part in Section 101 will begin with a simple but devastating conclusion:

§ 101 – Abstraction is nothing, rigorously pursued. Arithmetical zero is its sign. To perceive, think, and do nothing. To be nothing. Zero alone – in its infinite formulations – attains such exemption from indignity. (And it is time.)

We all remember reading that evil book of Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* who saw in the figure of Zero the "empty centre, the place where everything is supposed to be visible and intelligible, the place of knowledge" (p. 12).² That same Lyotard would explicate:

We do not even have to say: this is great Zero, what crap! After all, it is a figure of desire, and from what position could we assume to deny it this quality? In what other, no less terrorist Zero? One cannot assume a position on the twisted, shock-ridden, electrified labyrinth band. One's got to get this into one's head: the instantiation of intensities on an original Nothing, on an Equilibrium, and the folding back of complete parts onto the libidinal Moebian band, in the form of a theatrical volume, does not proceed from an error, from an illusion, from malice, from a counter-principle, but again from desire. One must realize that representing is desire, putting on stage, in a cage, in prison, into a factory, into a family, being boxed in are desired, that domination and exclusion are desired; that extreme intensities are instantiable in these assemblages too. (pp. 11-12)

To be Zero, doubled, split, folded back in the infinite loop of a derisive libidinal economy of vacuity, a self-reflecting nothingness cut off from all externality, intensity boxed, caged, imprisoned in the theatricality of its own solipsistic desire, dominated by nothing more nor less than the Zero Degree of thought: this alone is abstraction, and abstraction's horror.

§ 102 — Abstraction in itself is the sovereign of the negative determination, and can never fall under a formal relation. It does not oppose itself to the concrete, except in terms whose keys are encrypted within itself. Apophatic method (the *via negativa*) is its discipline.

Here it is cut off from any “formal relation,” neither opposing the concrete phenomenon or itself, except as it under the powers and dispositifs of its own internal volcanic pact decides by way of denial to speak in terms of what cannot be said or named, this unknowing or negative way into non-being at the heart of Zero and the Abyss.

§ 103 — Abstract negation, as Hegel perhaps understood, in deriding it, is the only kind that escapes. He recoils from a negativity that does no work or even (precisely) the opposite, and which redoubles without self-cancellation while still turning endlessly into itself. Abstract negation is already a doubling, of such redundancy that it sheds the pretense to generic negativity like Ouroboros skin – and in fact like nothing at all.

Eugene will offer us a way into such horrors of the abstract, this most *vita negativa*:

Whatever abstract horror has happened, it cannot be explained by the narrator. And yet, it must be explained, there must be an explanation. The narrator is so committed to this notion that he is willing to question his own sanity so that the “Horror” can be explained. And, the narrator continues, if I can’t explain it then there must be someone else who can. In lieu of this, he can only hope that someone else (doubtless we, the “dear readers”) will come along and provide an explanation, some explanation, any explanation.³

Is this not true of Land’s fable, this non-story of the Absolute Zero, the Abstract non-movement of thought turning and turning in its own void, the vacuous actuality of the withdrawn object bound in the cage of its on mad thinking seeking to install itself in the only thing it can – those others, those organic meat infested crustaceans of the earthly sphere who live in such minimal and bare unthought? Is this not the truth of Land’s little parable or anabasis, this death-march into the interior country of death itself, the slow methodical movement of thought returning to the Abyss?

The outlying language and characters of Land’s philo-fiction are unimportant, they are stage-craft, non-entities who actually believe they are living beings, humans in fact. But we know better, these are zombies awaiting the completion of an experiment in thought. Is this not what thought is: madness itself, the beginning, the moment of creation, the genealogy of gods and men, an terrible accident? Have we not known this all along? Known that our lives, our experiences, our universe is a catastrophe, a non-places: a realm of pure abstraction? We who sleep walk through existence believe we are alive, that this is life, without known that we are in the empty place, the kenoma of a vacant thought, the place of a silent disaster in process.

§ 104 — The elusiveness of the abstract can be rigorously illustrated. Division by zero exemplifies it, in the perfect extinction of illumination. It can only be forbidden because, once understood, it makes no sense. To divide by zero is to initiate an explosion without limit, of demonstrable irreversibility. The result returned is undefined (sufficiently so to crash computers). Though a gate to the tracts of the transfinite, there can be no retreat back through it. It allows nothing to be retrieved.

In an [interview](#) Land once remarked that “what is concealed (the Occult) is an alien order of time, which betrays itself through ‘coincidences’, ‘synchronicities’ and similar indications of an intelligent arrangement of fate. An example is the cabbalistic pattern occulted in ordinary languages – a pattern that cannot emerge without eroding itself, since the generalized (human) understanding and deliberated usage of letter-clusters as numerical units would shut down the channel of ‘coincidence’ (alien information). It is only because people use words without numerizing them, that they remain open as conduits for something else. To dissolve the screen that hides such things (and by hiding them, enables them to continue), is to fuse with the source of the signal and liquidate the world.” This is the core of Land’s project, this

secret complicity between the future, capitalism, and intelligence: a journey from the future to the past, a force driving every aspect of our civilization, the interminable movement of abstraction in its endless labyrinthine divagations among the logic of worlds. This irreversible juggernaut of time and nothing moving along a plane of inconsistency fading in and out, wandering the flux lanes of a million plateaus, a rhizomatic peek-a-boo adventure of the life and death drives in endless agon.

§ 105 — Abstract writing and aesthetic abstraction are each easily found in abundance. Logico-mathematical formalism provides the former, high modernism in the visual arts (especially) the latter. Yet literary high modernism has made a hash of its involvement with abstraction.

Fail, and fail better. Drifting between art and math abstraction seeks to discover itself under the guise of a formless form.

§ 106 — “I have nothing to say, and I’m saying it.” – John Cage.

Stop and go. Back and forth. Movement, but not progression. The circle of contradiction that can never be resolved or reconciled. Death-drive as the movement of time... life as its break, its rupture, exit. Between them the abyss, the gap, the crack in time; the split of tension and tensors, the topology of non-being and being at play in the wilderness of abstractions.

§ 107 — The term ‘blank verse’ amuses us.

Blank verse is distinguished by two interlaced features: the first being that the poems, for the most part, convey freethinking, i.e., the “independence of thought; specifically, the free exercise of reason in matters of religious belief, unconstrained by deference to authority” (Oxford English Dictionary qtd. on 2); and the second, that this freethinking is in part enabled by the hallmarks of the blank-verse form. As Weinfield writes, “all of these poets, at least in their finest work, are spiritual wanderers and freethinkers; they are all grappling with the **religious crisis, or crisis of modernity**. . . . **Blank verse gives them the license to wander and allows their freethinking tendencies to come to the fore**” (3).⁵

One should rather say it allows what is invisible to become visible in the abstraction. This is thought in the purity of its quest to make visible non-being in being. The impossible become possible. Zero as negation of negation... Žizek roaming in his own negations will surmise:

The death of Christ is also the death/ end of human mortality, the “death of death,” the negation of negation: the death of God is the rise of the undead drive (the undead partial object). Here, however, Hegel is not radical enough: since he is not able to think objet a, he also ignores bodily immortality (“undeadness”)—both Spinoza and Hegel share this blindness for the proper dimension of the objet a. How can a Christian believer come to terms with this obscene excess of immortality? Is the answer, once again, love? Can one love this excess?⁶

And, what of *hate*? Is there a nasty cruelty in excess? Isn’t the very form of time itself hateful, this continuous charade of decomposition, corruption, disintegration, catastrophe? Isn’t Žizek a little too idealistic for us, with all his talk of redemption? As if this zombieified immortality, this excess that returns upon itself without end, this negentropic calculator of some impossible machinic intelligence were love?

§ 108 — The object of abstract literature is integral obscurity. It seeks only to make an object of the unknown, as the unknown. Cryptropic nature captivates it (Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ). Whatever might imaginably be shown is something else, but then so – if not exactly equally – is anything that remains simply apart. Those who dedicate themselves to this dubious cause can be nothing but a surface effect of The Thing.

Are we all daemonic minions in a factory of blind process, things integral to the obscure thoughts of some blind god whose purposeless messages seem to communicate with us from some arcane region outside time and space; or, the truth of that secret guest who lives and the inhuman core of our own being, whispering to us from the abyss?

An “object of the unknown, as the unknown”? What would this be, how attest to this nothing that is, this void, this vacuous actuality? We remember Harman saying of objects, things, and entities:

...never do any two real things make contact. Even inanimate reality is an asymmetrical world of real entities making contact with phenomenal ones. Direct contact is no more found at the outset than in the result. Translation is no psychological quirk of unlucky humans whose mentality cannot probe the depths of things; rather, it belongs to the very stuff of relation. For causation to be vicarious means by the same stroke that it must be asymmetrical as well.⁷

This asymmetrical divide in Kant would be of the noumenal/phenomenal split: that which cannot be named, thought or seen directly; and that which is seen, thinkable, and directly apprehended by intuition, etc. “The genius of occasionalism was to cut things off from one another to such an extent that only God could link them. The solution was clearly outlandish, its vagueness protected from scrutiny only by the shield of piety, since the mechanisms of direct Divine contact were never explained. But at least this model grasped that things have a certain rigorous independence from one another. (p. 48)” says Harman. Of course today we live with a humanist form of this that SR terms the correlationist circle of cause and effect, that it is the Mind/World that are split, and the causal nexus is this reduction to concept between to indeterminate levels of being, this asymmetrical relation between the mental and stuff, etc. Yet, as Harman surmises all this modeling is more about disconnection and withdrawal, rather than relation and connection: its about the vacuous actuality of thing in their on Zero, cut off from each other yet being able to somehow cause effects with others indirectly. Fictions of processes little understood, which the sciences translate into long and tedious mathematical theorems, and philosophers translate into descriptive natural language or folk psychology. Is there and end?

§ 109 — Abstract literature writes in clues, with clue words, but without hope. It is the detective fiction of the insoluble crime, the science fiction of an inconceivable future, the mystery fiction of the impregnable unknown, proceeding through cryptic names of evocation, and rigid designators without significance. The weirdness it explores does not pass, unless to withdraw more completely into itself. There is no answer, or even – for long – the place for an answer. Where the solution might have been found waits something else. Description is damage.

Maybe that is it, a need to discover the clues left in being by non-being. A cosmic detective show seeking the answer to an “insoluble crime”? An Land as if echoing Harman describes alluringly that the “weirdness it explores does not pass, unless to withdraw more completely into itself”. This truth of things, the non-being of vacuous actuality of things sealed off in their vacuums, churning in the Zero degree of their own private infernal paradises.

§ 110 — John (18: 20) quotes the Nazarene: “in secret have I said nothing” (ἐν κρυπτῷ ἐλάλησα οὐδέν).

Is this not the ultimate truth, that we can say nothing? That everything we might say as Nietzsche once described it “That for which we **find words is something already dead** in our hearts. There is always a kind of contempt in the act of speaking.”

§ 111 — Sexual repression, pushed to an extreme, advances the mechanics of abstract literature. Puritanism is here set to dark work. Lovecraft (once again) exhibits the pattern. Whatever hides can be latched onto other hidden things.

There is a secret history of the world to be written which will describe the ambiguous adventures of non-being in being, of the hetereological indices of a sublime degradation.

§ 112 — Fiction is bound, from the beginning, to what is not. Non-occurrences are its special preoccupation. It trafficks with things that never happened, and lies on the path to Old Night.

Thomas Ligotti will offer little solace, but a beneficent collapse into that dark abyss from which we may never escape: our lives in this infernal paradise of time, saying,

The world of non-human bodies is activated directly in accord with the commands of that terrible force underlying all existence which issues only a few simple desires, none of which have to do with anything as nonsensical and dreamlike as creating works of art or of being an artist, of doing or being anything like these profoundly false and unreal things. Thus the world of non-human bodies never need suffer the pains of pursuing false and unreal desires, because such feelings have no relevance for those bodies and never arise within them.’⁸

This is the impersonal realm of vacuous actuality, of things cut off in the void of their own impossible non-being. Flying between idealism and materialism we ponder the navel of existence like insects tweaking our chemical register seeking after the clues to our next cannibal feast. The universal feeding machine of organic composition and decomposition churns on continuously revolving in the soup bin of cosmic decay and entropy. Yet, under the eye of our parent, the sun we rise and fall in the dust of secret assassinations, unknowing of our blindness and our ignorance. Believing we have a destiny, a fate, we stage the endless agons of our daily competitions driven by the very death-drive that so willingly seeks to slay us.

§ 113 — No one has yet done anything with unnonfiction (the word). Now is the time to unearth still less with it.

There is nothing to be done. There is no where to go. There is no one to see. There is nothing to know. Nothing to remember. Nothing.

§ 114 — Because literature knows nothing, it can turn blindness to a vision of the abyss. It evokes an apprehension of non-apprehension, or a perception of the imperceptible as such. Milton explores the abyss, in order to say nothing, positively, with unsurpassed eloquence. He makes *Paradise Lost* the Bible of abstract literature where “darkness visible” (I: 63), “the palpable obscure” (II: 406), shadow the ultimate unilluminousness of “Old Night” (I: 543). Horror is structurally Miltonic. What cannot be seen, or in any other way shown, can still be said.

*At once, as far as Angel’s ken,
he views The dismal situation waste and wild.
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames
No light; but rather **darkness visible**
Served only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all, but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed.*⁴

§ 115 — Lovecraft: “I choose weird stories because they suit my inclination best – one of my strongest and most persistent wishes being to achieve, momentarily, the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the

galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which for ever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis. These stories frequently emphasise the element of horror because fear is our deepest and strongest emotion, and the one which best lends itself to the creation of nature-defying illusions. Horror and the unknown or the strange are always closely connected, so that it is hard to create a convincing picture of shattered natural law or cosmic alienage or 'outsideness' without laying stress on the emotion of fear."

For the anti-realist the author's creation of both form and content, meant that there was no access to a "given and naked reality" outside the text. Reference becomes a circular movement within the text itself, which now contains the signifier and the signified wholly within it.⁹ The speculative realist against such enclosed prisons would tell us that contemporary philosophers have lost the "great outdoors, the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory – of being entirely elsewhere."¹⁰

Could it be that this life we live is in exile from elsewhere? Are we in the mirror-land among the ruins of being, Alice's children, mad-hatters one and all? "To extract ourselves from this communitarian or intersubjective solipsism is to access a great outdoors that would perform the same function for the mathematics contained in ancestral statements as the veracious God performed for extended substance. (Meillassoux, KL 747)"

§ 116 — Except, it is not fear that guides us. Abstract literature complies with a rigorous critique of fear, conducted in the name of horror. Fear nothing, until fear sheds its concreteness, and nothing switches its sign.

Let us not be deceived by fear and illusion, rather let us like non-metaphysical habitants of some abstract sphere conduct our inquiry into the terminal truth of non-being. "Hermetically Promethean in orientation, driven by a will to sustain a unilateral duality of Prometheus and Hermes as modes of being and thinking, Speculative Realism as a form of post-nihilism which thinks and lives according to nothing as something, is a venture into the Noumenal world..." says Cengiz: (see [here](#)). But why transcendence? Why some elsewhere beyond? Why not seek the circle for the circles sake? The amor fati of Nietzsche's eternal return?

What would the Nothingness involved in a non-nihilist configuration figuration be...?¹¹ Contingency? This is why amor fati, love of fate or love of necessity, is already, and in an immanent way, love of contingency. Or, as Nietzsche suggests, it is love *tout court*. (Zupancic, KL 1846) Or, Meillassoux (it must be abstract):

Our absolute, in effect, is nothing other than an extreme form of chaos, a *hyper-Chaos*, for which nothing is or would seem to be, impossible, not even the unthinkable. This absolute lies at the furthest remove from the absolutization we sought: the one that would allow mathematical science to describe the in-itself. (AF: KL 944)

Yet, Land admonishes us in 104: "Though a gate to the tracts of the transfinite, there can be no retreat back through it. It allows nothing to be retrieved." If our universe is pure informational complexity, a data-gram from elsewhere whose holographic insistence is that nothing is real, everything unreal and illusionary cinematic jouissance, then exactly where are the negatives upon which the light blinks its blank testament across the flickering dust of this imploding thought? Are we living forward or backward, is time not an explosion but rather a big crunch into that annihilating thought that sparked all beginnings? That bindu point of the ultimate abstract point of points where Zero hits a wall and discovers the black hole out of which it can enter the Great Outdoors of being?

§ 117 — The Thing horror pursues – and from which it flees – cannot be an object (if life is to continue). Its nonexistence is a presupposition of mental equilibrium. At the virtual horizon where thought encounters it,

absolute madness reigns. This coincidence is fundamental. At the end of horror lies that which – if there is merely to be sanity – cannot conceivably or imaginably exist. The image of the monster, then, is more than an error of method. It is a radical misapprehension. Anything that can be captured cannot be what horror seeks. Pictures are mistakes.

The Deleuze Dictionary tells us:

Nietzsche's speculations on metaphor show that there is no 'truth' behind the mask of appearances, but rather only more masks, more metaphors. Deleuze elevates this insight into something like a general metaphysical principle. For him, the world is composed of simulacra: it is a 'swarm' of appearances. ... All life perceives and is necessarily open to the 'outside' and distinctions between automatism and voluntary acts are only differences of degree, rather than differences in kind. This alternative, non-psychological metaphysics, according to which the world is 'luminous in itself', rather than being illuminated by a beam of consciousness, is at the heart of Deleuze's non-representational project... Following Bergson's materialist ontology, according to which our body is merely an image among images, Deleuze opens the self to the outside, the *pure form of time*. *The self comes into contact with a virtual, non-psychological memory, a domain of diversity, difference, and with potentially anarchic associations, that jeopardise the sense selfhood*.¹²

The great outdoors of being and non-being as the "pure form of time"? Land on the concept "templexity": Templexity is indistinguishable from unbounded real recursion, so it cannot be lucidly anticipated independently of a historical completion – or 'closure' (apprehended in the multitudinous sense noted in the text to follow). ...'Templexity' – as a sign – marks the suspicion that, if we are waiting for this to happen, we still understand nothing. (p. 4).¹³ Our universe a closed time-loop? As Land quotes Seth Lloyd et al. (2011) "... closed timelike curves are a generic feature of highly curved, rotating spacetimes ..." (Templexity, p. 25). Wheels within wheels, a chariot of looping fiery particles churning in the dark matter/energy of the mudder/mattering void?

§ 118 — There is no difference between abstract literature and horror, conceived in profundity (in the abyss). An encounter with the absolutely cognitively intolerable cannot conclude in a positive presentation. The makers of horror have long been expected to understand that – even if they still typically submit to the sins of exhibition, the lust to show, and tell. Within the image, horror is interred. Thus, abstract literature is committed to a definite iconoclasm, which is also a vow of silence – though a hidden silence.

One of those simple but powerful insights Harman discovered in his study of Heidegger was the observation that we only ever come to notice things when they break down, when they rear their ugly heads up out of the background of being and surprise us by their eruption into our lives. These things, these lumps of stuff surrounding us were the moment before just silent guests hidden in the background of the cosmic parade of phenomenality, mere appearances in an otherwise mundane world of boring dullness. In the moment that this broken thing awakened us from our stupor, this accident of timespace intruded its *thusness* into our lives we begin to feel a disturbance, a challenge, a knowledge of something unknown but real. And what is real anyway? For Harman realism "does not mean that we are able to state correct propositions about the real world" (whatever that might be?), but rather "it means that reality is too real to be *translated* without remainder into any sentence, perception, practical action, or anything else" (WR, p. 16).¹⁴

Translation in Harman's terms is the distortion of the reality any intention addresses. This intention is not specific to human logic or language, but to all object-object relations. Levi R. Bryant in a **post once suggested**: a translation is an interaction that produces a difference in what is translated. The thesis that objects only relate by translating one another is, under my reading, the thesis that there will always be more in the effect than was there in the cause by virtue of how an entity translates the interactions it receives from another entity. So what does this entail? It entails *perspectivism*. Perspectivism isn't the thesis that beings are nothing but perspectives – after all, beings are *real* – but is

rather the thesis that we must attend to how entities other than ourselves encounter interactions with other entities in the world around us.

As Gengiz Erdem relates it this brings us to the issue of the “split nature of reality itself. The melancholic Cartesian subject cannot access the reality in-itself precisely because the reality is always already split in-itself. Strange though as it may sound the in-itself is itself split. And stranger still, that split is not within something, but rather between something and nothing. We can say that the gap between the real and the symbolic is included within reality itself. Perhaps that’s why Žižek insists on the need to affirm the mediation of illusion, the necessity of fantasy in accessing reality as it is in-itself.” (see [here](#))

§ 119 — Horror anticipates philosophy, spawns it automatically, and provides its ultimate object – abstraction (in itself). It comes from the same non-place to which philosophy tends. If skepticism teaches philosophy what it need not think, horror persuades it that it cannot. In this way, the pact between abstraction and horror – the thing – surpasses anything philosophy could ever be, or know.

Žižek falling back on Lacan will remark, so far so good, we may say: by way of transposing what appears as an epistemological limit into the Thing itself, Hegel shows how the problem is its own solution— but in what precise sense? To avoid a fatal misunderstanding: this crucial dialectical move from epistemological obstacle to ontological impossibility in no way implies that all we can do is reconcile ourselves to this impossibility, i.e., accept reality itself as imperfect. The premise of psychoanalysis is that one can intervene with the symbolic into the Real, because the Real is not external reality-in-itself, but a crack in the symbolic, so one can intervene with an act which re-configures the field and thus transforms its immanent point of impossibility. “Traversing the fantasy” does not mean accepting the misery of our lives— on the contrary, it means that only after we “traverse” the fantasies obfuscating this misery can we effectively change it. (LTN, KL 10949-56)

Isn’t horror literature, art, cinema, etc. the enactment of this very process of “traversing the fantasy,” of intervening with the symbolic into the Real, seeking through a *vita negativa* act a way to re-configure the entire field immanently at just that point of impossibility?

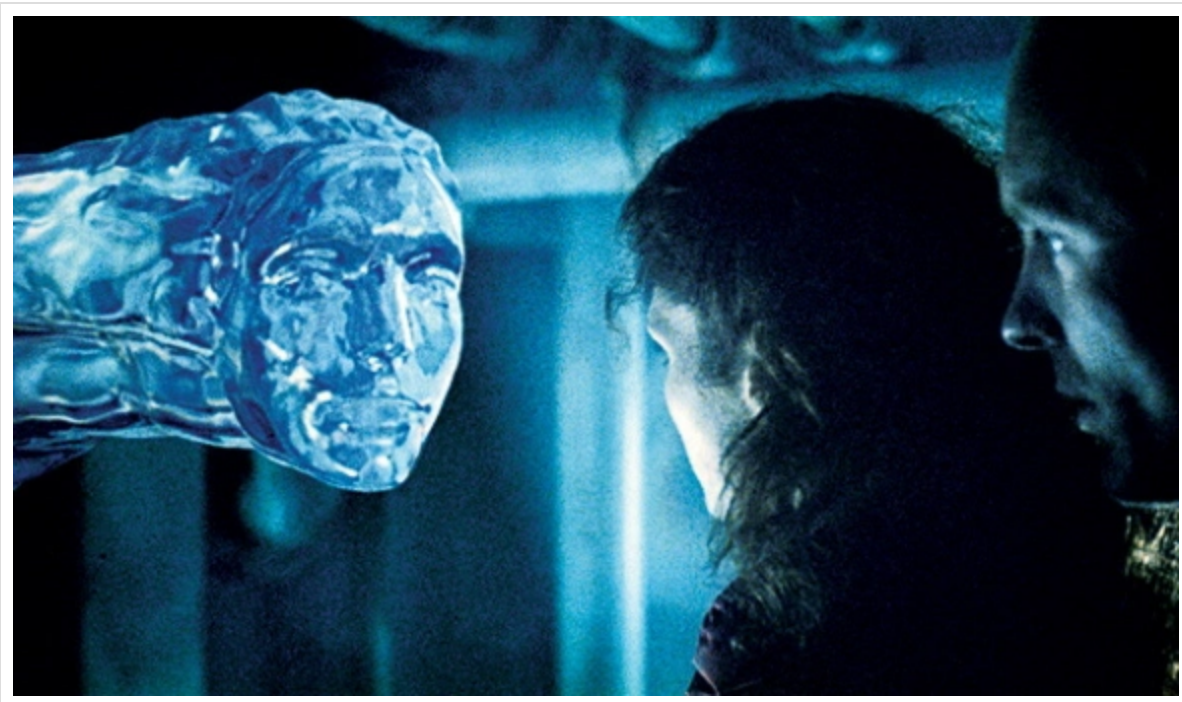
§ 120 — Abstract literature borrows its guides from horror, which are monsters. ‘Invisible’ monsters we are tempted to say, over-hastily. No monster can be more, or less, than partially – horribly – seen (as etymology reliable attests). The monster is liminal, or diagonal. It discloses a lurid obscurity.

Are not these monstrous entities the doorway to abstraction? The mask of its insidious appeal, the allurements of its degrading magnificence? Are we not mesmerized by the powers of infectious glimmers, lured into the labyrinth of unknown and unknowable disclosures that are neither given nor directly known, but hold open to us the indirect access to a secret and ruinous knowledge that cannot be had any other way?

§ 121 — The initial stage of monstrosity is ‘simple’ beyondness. A monster has as its leading characteristic the nature of an excessive being. It is first of all a counter- humanoid, eluding anthropomorphic recognition. Since ‘inhumanity’ remains captured within a dialectical relation, it is preferable to invoke a ‘non-’ or ‘un-humanity’ determined abstractly – in the way of the wholly unknown aliens from James Cameron’s *The Abyss* (1989) – only as “something not us”. A minimal condition for monstrosity is radical unhumanity.

What we see below is the Thing (whatever it is) indirectly rather than directly, since how we take notice is through the ‘things’ manipulation of the liquid element of water, manipulating it to translate itself into an apparent human-like facial expression; and, yet we very well know that underneath this façade and apparently the appearance of appearance is the very inhuman power or energetic force of the alien thing itself. So that we are

never in touch with the thing itself, but on as it reveals itself for-us as a phenomenon to be evaluated, interpreted, suffered...



§ 122 — Even as it consumes all attention, monstrosity does not look like anything. At the crudest level of perceptual disorganization, it dismantles morphology into the seething complexity of tentacle-monsters and bug-creatures – plasticized, metamorphic, and poly-segmentary beings – for which (China Miéville) “Squidity” is the supreme archetype. At a more advanced level of abstraction, they slough off even these residual forms as larval constrictions, becoming shape-shifting horrors, adopting the body-plans of their prey, as they evolve fluidly into the way hunt. At their intensive zenith, they sublime to sheer system, syndrome – reproduction cycles, patterns of parasitization, epidemiological profiles, and convergent waves – conceivable only through what they do.

In the deeper dreams everything was likewise more distinct, and Gilman felt that the twilight abysses around him were those of the fourth dimension. Those organic entities whose motions seemed least flagrantly irrelevant and unmotivated were probably projections of life-forms from our own planet, including human beings. What the others were in their own dimensional sphere or spheres he dared not try to think. Two of the less irrelevantly moving things—a rather large congeries of iridescent, prolately spheroidal bubbles and a very much smaller polyhedron of unknown colours and rapidly shifting surface angles—seemed to take notice of him and follow him about or float ahead as he changed position among the titan prisms, labyrinths, cube-and-plane clusters, and quasi-buildings; and all the while the vague shrieking and roaring waxed louder and louder, as if approaching some monstrous climax of utterly unendurable intensity.

– H.P. Lovecraft – *The Dreams in the Witch House*

This sense of monstrous abstract entities from other dimensions of impossibility, the mathematical and diagrammatic anti-representational purity of something barely registered on the screen of a neuroencephalitically shocked specimen of this irreality – named, the human, Gilman. This movement from the mundane into a purely geometrical monstrous realm inhabited by a strange order of being within Riemannian poly-dimensional space opens us to that cosmic terror where abstraction becomes in deep and fact “darkness visible”. (also see Harman WR: p. 199-200)

Sustained by a rhetoric of figural translations that shift us from register to register across the streams of mathematic precision and poetic anti-Platonism this materialist movement that neither objectifies nor reduces to the subjectivation of some inner ‘night of the world’ brings with it that intensive science of pleasure we know as horror.

§ 123 — Fundamental ontology tells us that whatever happens (in time) is not time, and being is no thing. “The nothing nothings nothingishly,” or whatever Heidegger said, or didn’t say, it matters not, until unnonfiction seizes upon it (as it will). There can never be enough negative ontology, because what being is not exceeds it.

Land in another era would remind us of Kant, saying,

Perhaps nothing was clearer to Kant than the radical untenability of the Leibnizian paradigm of metaphysics, still dominant in the (Wolfian) philosophy of the Prussian state. Logicism had been exposed, by the sceptical and empirical thought of a more advanced social system, as a sterile tautological stammering that belonged to the Middle Ages when positivity had been given in advance. It was with extraordinary resolve that Kant jettisoned the deductive systematization that had characterized the philosophies of immobilist societies – philosophies deeply and deliberately rooted in stagnant theism – and replaced it with the *metaphysics of excess*.¹⁵

He will continue, saying,

In the third critique there is a far more aggressive conception of excess, which generates a feeling of delight, because it is essentially extortionate. *This excess is not a surplus of certainty stemming from dimensions of objectivity possessed in advance of intuition, and thus by right, but rather a surplus of purchase upon the object.* ... Kant’s advice to the imperial war-machine in his third critique can be summarized as: ‘treat all resistance as if it were less than you might justifiably fear’. The Critique of Judgment thus projects the global victory of capitalized reason as pure and exuberant ambition. (FN: KL 997-992)

Already we see that equivalence and suggestion that Capital and Intelligence, the force from the far flung futurity of our earth that drives us forward retroactively intervening in the time of our time at work and play in the very real material processes of our socio-cultural systems. The Symbolic Order driven forward by the very processes of that death-drive that emerges within the excessive violence of what is and will remain unnameable.

§ 124 — Much has to be conceded to our hypothetical interlocutor, who asks: “Is it not, then the intrinsic mission of abstract literature to visit infinite ontological devastation upon its readers?” For how could that be avoided? Our task cannot be other than to supplant intolerable nightmares with yet worse ones. Mercifully, this is no easy thing (from a certain regard), even if it is an ineluctable destiny (from others).

Would it not be true that the greatest fiction of our current civilization as enacted in Global Capitalism? Land will admit a tentative definition of this process of horror:

Hyperstition is a positive feedback circuit including culture as a component. It can be defined as the experimental (techno-)science of self-fulfilling prophecies. Superstitions are merely false beliefs, but hyperstitions – by their very existence as ideas – function causally to bring about their own reality. Capitalist economics is extremely sensitive to hyperstition, where confidence acts as an effective tonic, and inversely. The (fictional) idea of Cyberspace contributed to the influx of investment that rapidly converted it into a technosocial reality. (see [here](#))

And, finally, we come to the end of the Abstract Manifesto:

§ 125 — From whence comes this grim pact with the abyss? We can only respond, with confidence – from the abyss. If another answer were plausible, then abstract literature would be expression, when it is only – or at least overwhelmingly – exploration, and to explore, from the other side, is to let something in.

Walter Pater in that dilapidated era of aesthetes and symbolists admonished his followers that “we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among “the children of this world,” in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into that given time...” (The Renaissance). Freud in that sublime passage from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

*Our views have from the very first been dualistic, and today they are even more definitely dualistic than before – now that we describe the opposition as being, not between ego-instincts and sexual instincts but between life instincts and death instincts. Jung’s libido theory is on the contrary monistic; the fact that he has called his one instinctual force ‘libido’ is bound to cause confusion, but need not affect us otherwise.*¹⁶

This age-old battle between Sophists and Philosophers much touted between the modern divide between Continental (Philosophers) and Analytical (Sophists) comes down to an preference between two ontologies: math and poetry. Both offering their version of “*surplus of purchase upon the object*,” that realm of non-being and being entwined in the difference between *figural* and *literal* meaning. Those who would reduced the excess to the known and conceptual harbor the annihilation of the world, secretly in alliance with the death-drives. While those who see it as impossible to confine things to the irreducible markers and traces of some descriptive science or metaphysic are aligned with Eros, or the life-drives that follow the metamorphic power of the figural, the open and incomplete. Between them the practitioners of horror play the dialectical game of insight and blindness, neither in or out of the game, but oscillating between being and non-being like troubadours of an impossible dream of thought. One discovers that desire is itself the outer form of the death-drive that has for so long driven us into this accelerating void of the Abyss.

Like Zodh, the Court Jester and native shaman, once said to his mates:

Here’s the thing. What you think is behind, and beneath, isn’t so. That’s an image. You spun it for the sense of protection it brings. It disguises a hole, because if you saw what was missing, you’d never sleep. You don’t know what’s there, at all. You can be shown that you don’t know what’s there. It isn’t hard, to show that. A simple trick is enough to do it. There’s a gap in you – a massive missingness – the back and underside torn away. Lots of other encroachments of unbeing, but that’s the main one. You’re a flimsy mask pasted onto a sucking wound in the world. That’s the starting point. It’s the way to turn, and go, if you want to learn. Look behind you. Into the real backspace you’re pretending isn’t there.

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